

WASHINGTON (October 27, 2009)- Congressman Spencer Bachus (AL-6) today said the U.S. military and taxpayers deserve the best in value from a new air refueling tanker sought by the Pentagon.

Bachus spoken at a news conference where members of the Alabama congressional delegation questioned the fairness of the contract competition for the KC-X tanker project.

Bachus has signed a letter to Defense Secretary Robert Gates expressing concern that a draft contract proposal favors a single competitor for the project, discriminating against other bidders and potentially costing Alabama hundreds of defense jobs.

Congressman Bachus' prepared remarks follow.

The KC-X tanker is vital to our national security. It is important for jobs in the State of Alabama. The Air Force has to get this right.

We need the proposal that will best serve both the American people and the taxpayer.

You only get that through a fair and open competitive process.

With all of the stops and starts with the tanker over the years, we'd hoped that the new draft RFP would finally put us on a straight path forward.

Unfortunately, it fails the test.

As we have pointed out in our letter to Secretary Gates, the draft RFP is skewed in the

favor of one company and one criteria.

It's like a football game where the referees start one team in the red zone and let them see the opposition's game plan.

Let's be clear. We want the best deal for the taxpayer, so the cost of the bid must be an important consideration.

But when it comes to our national security - quality and cost cannot be separated. We can and must have the best of both.

A pilot desperately low on fuel - perhaps with battle damage - deserves the finest tanker his country can provide.

Today, our B-2 bombers fly missions from Shreveport to Iraq - 32 hours. It's hard on pilots and impossible without solid, reliable tankers. Refueling capabilities allow the U.S. to respond to security challenges at a moment's notice.

The way the contract proposal is written right now, the new tanker could be obsolete in a few years at a cost of tens of billions of dollars to the U.S. taxpayer. That would be a colossal waste of money as well as an inexcusable disservice to our soldiers.

That is why the Air Force needs to rewrite this proposal to take every appropriate factor into account. That includes cost but also the full range of capabilities needed to serve our 21st Century military.

All we are asking for is a fair competition. If we get that, I think the State of Alabama will fare very well on the merits. Our workers have an outstanding record of producing on-time, on-cost projects for the Defense Department.

But they have no chance of competing if they are unfairly penalized before the game even starts.